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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 005226

SIPDIS

FROM FODAG

STATE FOR U/S LARSON AND ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY BILL
WOODS
OES FOR HAROLD FOSTER, EB FOR KLEMM AND MALAC
USDA FOR ED SCARBROUGH, USDA/FAS FOR REICH/HUGHES,
USDA/APHIS FOR ENRIGHT/DUNAHAY
UNCLASSIFIED

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USAID FOR JOSETTE LEWIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AORC](#) [EAGR](#) [EAGR](#) [SENV](#) [FAO](#) [WHO](#) [SENV](#) [AORC](#) [FAO](#) [WHO](#)
SUBJECT: WFP BOARD DISCUSSION OF BIOTECH FOOD

1. SUMMARY: DURING THE OCTOBER 21, 2002 DISCUSSION OF BIOTECH ENGINEERED FOOD AID AT THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAM, EU MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD ARGUED THAT WORKABLE ALTERNATIVES TO BIOTECH ENGINEERED FOOD AID MUST BE FOUND AND THAT THE SOVEREIGN RIGHT OF COUNTRIES TO ACCEPT OR REJECT BIOTECH FOOD AID MUST BE RESPECTED. THE EU ARGUED IN FAVOR OF IMPLEMENTING "ADVANCE INFORMED AGREEMENT" BEFORE THE ENTRY INTO FORCE OF THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL. THE UNITED STATES SPOKE MOST FORCEFULLY ON BEHALF OF THOSE WHO ARE IN DANGER OF STARVING (WITH SUPPORT FROM CANADA AND JAPAN). THE G-77 COUNTRIES STATED THAT THEY HAD NOT HAD ADEQUATE TIME TO CONSIDER THIS COMPLEX ISSUE AND WOULD HAVE TO CONSULT THEIR CAPITALS. THE DUTCH, WHO HAD REQUESTED THE ITEM BE CONSIDERED BY THE BOARD, PUSHED FOR A STRONGER DECISION FROM THE BOARD THAN THE ONE ADOPTED (TO "TAKE NOTE" OF THE PAPER AND "LOOK FORWARD" TO FOLLOW UP MEASURES.) THE OFFICERS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD WILL LIKELY MEET TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO BEFORE THE NEXT EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING IN FEBRUARY. END SUMMARY.

2. AT THE REQUEST OF THE NETHERLANDS DELEGATION, THE WFP EXECUTIVE BOARD HAD BEFORE IT AN INFORMATION DOCUMENT OUTLINING WFP POLICY CONCERNING BIOTECH ENGINEERED FOOD AID. THE ENSUING DISCUSSION ON OCTOBER 21, 2002 REVEALED SERIOUS CONFUSION AND CONCERNS AMONG BOTH OECD DONOR AND
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RECIPIENT COUNTRIES CONCERNING THE HEALTH AND
ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECT OF BIOTECH ENGINEERED FOOD.

3. THE DUTCH, IN THEIR INTRODUCTORY REMARKS, ACKNOWLEDGED THAT WFP WAS NOT THE PLACE TO DISCUSS FOOD SAFETY NOR TRADE, BUT ARGUED THAT IT WAS THE FORUM TO DISCUSS FOOD AID. THEY EMPHASIZED THE RIGHT OF RECIPIENT COUNTRIES TO ACCEPT OR REFUSE FOOD AID ON THE BASIS OF "INFORMED CONSENT" AND CALLED FOR PROVIDING WORKABLE ALTERNATIVES TO BIOTECH FOOD AID. NORWAY AND BELGIUM ANNOUNCED THEY WOULD RESTRICT CASH CONTRIBUTIONS TO PURCHASE NON-GMO FOOD ONLY. SWITZERLAND NOTED THAT EVEN IF FOOD WAS SAFE TO CONSUME, THE EFFECT ON BIODIVERSITY WAS STILL UNCLEAR AND ADVOCATED MILLING.

4. THE EC REPRESENTATIVE SAID THAT HE REALIZED THAT NON-ACCEPTANCE POSED LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS SUCH THAT FOOD MIGHT NOT ARRIVE IN TIME TO SAVE LIVES. HOWEVER, GOVERNMENTS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO APPLY THE PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AGAINST ADVERSE EFFECTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT FROM BIOTECH MAIZE (PARTICULARLY BULK FOOD AID BEING USED AS SEEDS WHICH WAS LIKELY TO CONTAMINATE LOCAL VARIETIES WHICH WERE "BETTER ADAPTED.") THE EC ASKED DONORS TO GIVE CASH TO FUND LOCAL PROCUREMENT OF FOOD AID. THEY ALSO CALLED FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ADVANCE INFORMED AGREEMENT PROVISION OF THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL "BEFORE IT ENTERED INTO FORCE." AT THE SAME TIME, THE EC REPRESENTATIVES ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE EU ALLOWS THE IMPORT OF GM MAIZE FOR FOOD AND INTENTIONAL INTRODUCTION INTO THE ENVIRONMENT, AND DOES NOT BAN THE IMPORT OF ANIMALS FED ON GM MAIZE.
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5. THE U.S. PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, AMBASSADOR TONY HALL, SPOKE FORCEFULLY IN FAVOR OF ACCEPTING BIOTECH ENGINEERED FOOD AID TO PREVENT IMPENDING DISASTER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. HE RECOUNTED THAT HE HAD VISITED THE SUB-REGION LAST WEEK AND WITNESSED FIRST-HAND HOW DESPERATE THE SITUATION WAS. AMBASSADOR HALL STATED THAT BECAUSE INTERNATIONAL BODIES WERE DEBATING GM FOOD IT WAS CREATING FEAR AND CAUSING DELAYS IN GETTING ASSISTANCE TO THE HUNGRY AND AS A RESULT, PEOPLE WOULD DIE. AMBASSADOR HALL POINTED OUT THAT THE UNITED STATES HAD PREDICTED THERE WOULD BE A CRISIS AND RESPONDED IN A TIMELY WAY

WITH DONATIONS OF TONS OF FOOD THAT IS EATEN BY MILLIONS EVERY DAY IN THE UNITED STATES AND ELSEWHERE. THIS WAS FOOD THAT HAD BEEN SUBJECTED TO RIGOROUS TESTING FOR SAFETY AND WHICH POSED NO KNOWN RISK TO HUMAN HEALTH. RATHER, BIOTECH FOOD OFFERED HOPE FOR THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE.

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ACTION SSO-00

INFO LOG-00 AID-00 ANHR-00 EB-00 E-00 UTEDE-00
IO-00 OES-01 SS-00 TEST-00 SAS-00 /001W
-----FE1116 250950Z /38

R 250900Z OCT 02
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6562
INFO USMISSION GENEVA
USMISSION US IN NEW YORK NY
USDA FAS WASHDC 2343
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
AMEMBASSY MASERU
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY HARARE
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY MBABANE
AMEMBASSY LILONGWE
USEU BRUSSELS 2870

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17. AMBASSADOR HALL MENTIONED THAT NO ONE HE MET IN SOUTHERN AFRICA MENTIONED BIOTECH -- NOT NGO'S, OR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, LET ALONE POTENTIAL BENEFICIARIES. HE CLOSED BY NOTING THAT BOTH ACTION AND INACTION HAVE CONSEQUENCES IN SUCH A SITUATION.

18. THE FEW REPRESENTATIVES OF THE G-77 THAT SPOKE VOICED THEIR FRUSTRATION AT BEING CAUGHT IN THIS DILEMMA. IRAN, WHO CHAIRS THE G-77, SAID THE RECIPIENTS DON'T KNOW IF THERE IS A RISK OR NOT, THAT PEOPLE ARE FACED WITH THE "CHOICE BETWEEN STARVING NOW OR DYING IN SIX MONTHS TIME IF THEY CONSUME GMO'S." HE CALLED ON WFP TO BRING IN EXPERTS TO INFORM THE MEMBERSHIP. ZIMBABWE, WHO SPEAKS FOR THE AFRICAN REGIONAL GROUP, SAID THE ISSUE WAS TOO SENSITIVE TO DECIDE WITHOUT CONSULTING WITH CAPITALS.

19. COMMENT: AS EXPECTED, THE DISCUSSION OF BIOTECH ENGINEERED FOOD AID DEGENERATED INTO A DISCUSSION OF THE "RISKS" -- TO HUMAN HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT -- BY A BODY THAT IS NOT EQUIPPED OR MANDATED TO HANDLE QUESTIONS OF RISK ANALYSIS AND RISK MANAGEMENT. THE EU COUNTRIES APPEAR TO BE LINING UP BEHIND THE "SOLUTION" OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL'S "ADVANCE INFORMED AGREEMENT" PROVISIONS PRIOR TO ENTRY INTO FORCE
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OF THE AGREEMENT. THE COMPLACENCY OF THIS APPROACH -- WHICH BEGS THE QUESTION OF HOW AND WHY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE EXPECTED TO PROVIDE SUCH AGREEMENT IS SHOCKING WHEN THE HUMAN SUFFERING RESULTING FROM DELAYS IS ALREADY THERE TO BE SEEN. HALL

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